

CLAYTON FRITCHEY

CIA Hit by Puerto Rican Student Charges

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SAN JUAN, P.R.—As if the Central Intelligence Agency didn't already have enough trouble with students in the United States, it has also been accused of inciting attacks here in San Juan against Puerto Rican students who are campaigning for independence of the island.

Juan Mari Bras, a wealthy lawyer who is secretary-general of the Pro Independence Movement (PIM), charges that the Association of University Students for Statehood (AUPE) is really an "instrument" of the CIA, and that AUPE is responsible for a recent rock-throwing assault on a group of youths demonstrating for independence.

"We do not have the slightest doubt," said Mari Bras, "that in back of all this is the infamous CIA, which has been trying through its San Juan office, to attack the PIM and the independence struggle in general."

Mari Bras may not have any "doubts," but most other Puerto Ricans do. His charges against the CIA are not taken seriously, but they have

nevertheless served his purpose of attracting attention to the emotional new political struggle that is developing here unbeknownst to most Americans.

Since this conflict revolves primarily about the island's relations with the United States, and will probably come to a head later this year through a plebiscite on status, Americans are soon going to be hearing a great deal about it, especially if Mari Bras and his sensational new ally, the one and only Stokely Carmichael (head of SNCC), have anything to do with it.

Carmichael, whose leadership of the Students Non-Violent Coordinating Committee so aroused Americans last year, has come and gone from Puerto Rico, but he will be back, and meanwhile he is busy stirring up things in New York where 700,000 Puerto Ricans now live.

In fact, Carmichael and Mari Bras have issued a joint communique saying they will work together against the war in Vietnam, the draft, and

"police brutality," and for better housing, education, and living conditions in urban slums.

The Independistas share the view of Cuba's Fidel Castro that Puerto Rico is merely a "perfumed colony" of the United States. The PIM and SNCC alliance intends to try to bring questions of Puerto Rican independence and Negro "oppression" in the United States before the United Nations.

All this makes headlines, but here in San Juan interest centers not on the Independistas (as of now a negligible group), but on the coming battle at the polls between the two major parties, one of which stands for the present commonwealth status and the other for statehood.

In the United States it is generally assumed that all or nearly all of Puerto Rico is happy and contented with its existing status, but actually there is a substantial dissent. Just how big this is nobody knows (that's what the plebiscite, if it is held, is supposed

to determine) but there is certainly a strong, if minority, sentiment for full statehood, especially among the more affluent and better educated elements.

It is a curious fact that although only a handful of Eskimos and Hawaiians live in the United States, both Alaska and Hawaii enjoy statehood, but Puerto Rico, with perhaps 1.5 million residing in the United States, remains something less, or, as some would have it, equal but separate.

In any case, Puerto Rico is neither fish nor fowl. There is no other status quite like it anywhere else in the world. It is part of the United States and yet isn't. The people escape the income tax, but not the draft. And so it goes.

Modern Puerto Rico is really almost the work of one man, the incomparable Munoz Marin, who founded the Popular Democratic party and was the governor for so many years until he insisted on retiring in 1964.

But even in "retirement" he is "Mr. Puerto Rico," with an immense popular following, particularly among the workers and peasants. He is the father of the "commonwealth" arrangement with the United States, and as long as he continues to favor it (and he does wholeheartedly), it probably will persist.

Nevertheless, there seems to be a growing sentiment for statehood. Blessed by the strong leadership of Luis Ferre and Miguel Gacia Mendez, the Republican Statehood party has shot up from 85,172 votes in 1952 to 284,627 in 1964.

This is still only a little more than 34 percent of the total vote, but there is a strong belief that the percentage would be considerably larger in an election where statehood was the only issue. Many also feel that statehood would win outright if Munoz Marin was out of the picture.

Munoz himself thinks commonwealth would win even if he were dead. However, as he said to me, "I do not intend to take my life to prove the point."

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